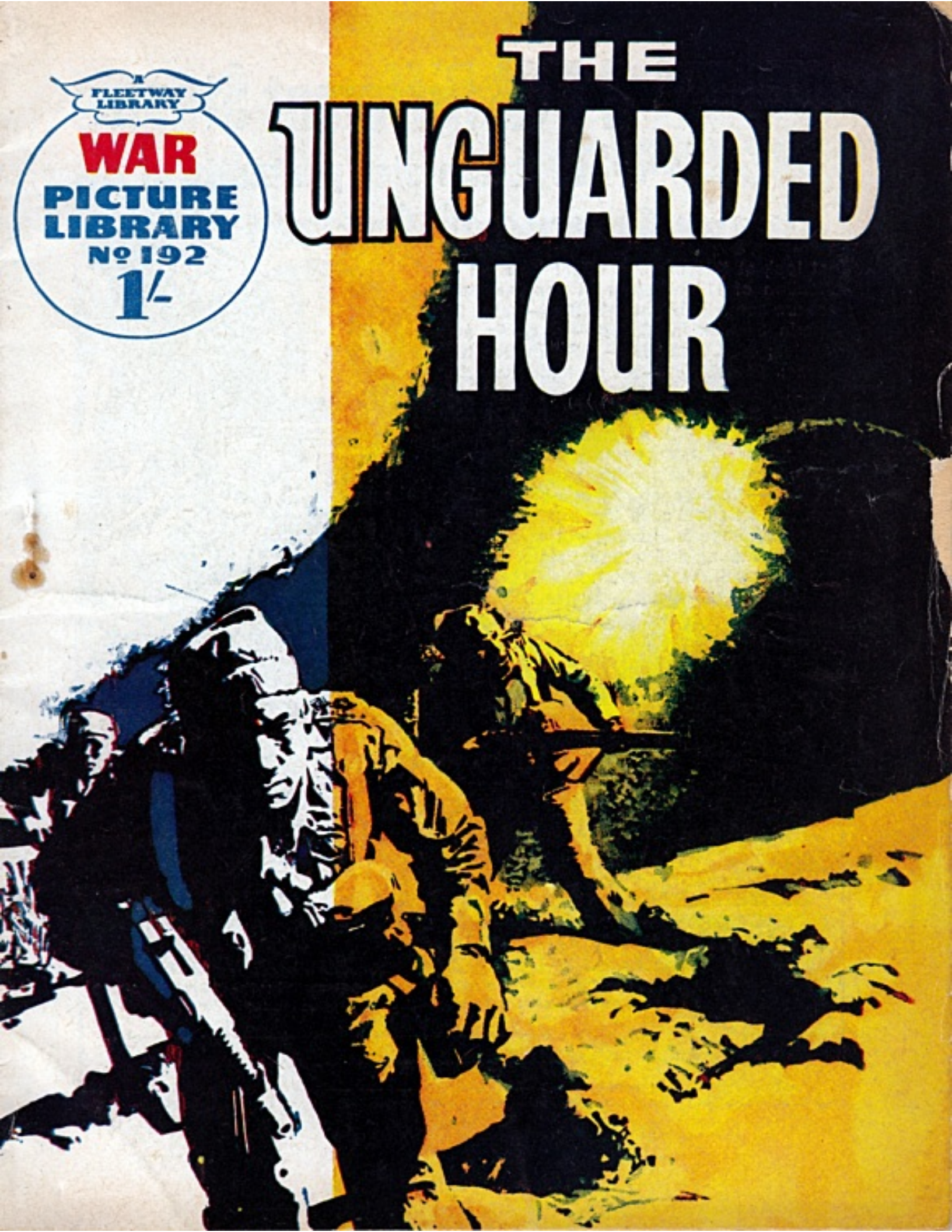


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THE UNGUARDED HOUR



SOMETIMES IT IS DIFFICULT TO SEPARATE FACT FROM LEGEND. EVEN AFTER THE LAPSE OF A FEW YEARS, IMAGINATION BEGINS TO PLAY A PART IN THE RELATING OF EVENTS. HERE ARE TWO STORIES; ONE CARVED IN COLD STONE BY AN ANCIENT CIVILISATION, THE OTHER CONTAINED IN THE PRECISE OFFICIAL ARCHIVES OF THE WAR OFFICE. CAN THEY BE DISMISSED AS FLIGHTS OF FANCY?

I AM PROFESSOR KORNGOLD
I HAD NOT SEEN THE WAR OFFICE
RECORDS WHEN THE SKAGGER
RUNESTONE PHOTOGRAPHS WERE
SENT TO ME FOR TRANSLATION.

Chapter 1. A Goward's Dream

ARCHAEOLOGISTS AND HISTORIANS KNEW PROFESSOR KORNGOLD AS THE OUTSTANDING AUTHORITY ON RUNIC WRITING, THAT IS, THE WRITINGS OR CARVINGS IN THE ANCIENT CHARACTERS OF NORTHERN EUROPE.



IT IS ONLY BY CHANCE THAT THE WAR OFFICE RECORDS CAME INTO MY HANDS AFTER—AND MARK ME WELL—AFTER I HAD WRITTEN OUT THE STORY OF THE RUNESTONE FOUND ON THE ISLAND OF SKAGGER.

THE ISLAND OF SKAGGER! REMOTE, MISTY ISLE OF THE NORTH—CALLED BY SOME THE ISLAND OF DISHONOURABLE DEATH.

IN THE CAMP OF SVEN THE VIKING, ON THE NIGHT BEFORE BATTLE WITH RIVAL TRIBES, TWO TIRED SENTRIES WERE SUDDENLY BROUGHT TO INSTANT ALERTNESS BY A HIGH-PITCHED, FRIGHTENED VOICE. THEY RAN TO THE PLACE FROM WHENCE IT CAME...



KEEP AWAY—DON'T COME NEAR ME! HELP—THE MONSTER, IT'S... AAAGH!

IT IS THE VOICE OF THE CHIEF'S SON! HASTEN—WE MUST HELP HIM!

THE MOONLIGHT GLINTED ON NAKED STEEL AS THE SENTRIES PLUNGED INTO THE TENT OF SVENSON. THEY STARED ABOUT THEM IN SURPRISE...



I MUST GET AWAY—
THE MONSTER. HELP
ME — HELP!

THERE IS NO-ONE
HERE. SVENSON
DREAMS AN EVIL
DREAM!

WAKE HIM UP!
THAT IS ALL THE
HELP WE CAN
GIVE HIM.



ROUGH HANDS SHOOK THE CHIEF'S SON INTO WAKEFULNESS. STILL GRIPPED IN THE TERROR OF HIS EVIL NIGHTMARE, HE STARED IN DRUGGED HORROR.

WAKE UP,
LAD! YOU WERE
DREAMING!

WITH THE DAWN THE VIKINGS GIRDED THEMSELVES FOR BATTLE. THE CHIEF'S SON APPEARED WITH HAGGARD FACE...

HO, LAD! WHAT AILS THEE ON THIS DAY OF BATTLE?

IT IS NAUGHT, MY FATHER. I SLEPT ILL, BUT I JOY IN THE COMING FRAY.

BUT THE YOUNG MAN AVOIDED THE KEEN SCRUTINY OF HIS FATHER'S EYES. ANOTHER MAN WAS STANDING CLOSE BY AND HIS COMPELLING GLANCE MADE SVENSON TURN AND LOOK UP...

GUDVIED!

STEP ASIDE WITH ME FOR A MOMENT, MY SON...

GUDVIED THE WARLOCK POSSESSED STRANGE POWERS OVER MEN'S MINDS - AND, SO THE VIKINGS BELIEVED - OVER THE VERY FORCES OF NATURE HERSELF...



THE BATTLE WILL BE A TEST OF YOUR NEW MANHOOD, SVENSON. BUT SOMETHING TROUBLES YOU...

IT IS MY DREAMS, GUDVIED. I DREAM OF STRANGE BATTLES AND WEIRD MONSTERS. I CANNOT UNDERSTAND THEIR MEANING AND I SHALL HAVE NO REST UNTIL I DO...

THE WARHORN OF THE VIKINGS WERE SOUNDING THEIR ROUSING CHALLENGE AS SVEN LED HIS WARRIORS TO MEET THEIR ENEMIES. GUDVIED CALLED AFTER THE SON OF THE CHIEF...



FORGET YOUR DREAMS, SVENSON, UNTIL AFTER THE BATTLE. I WILL SPEAK WITH YOU AGAIN LATER...

I CANNOT FORGET THE DREAMS - BUT I WILL FIGHT!

SOON, THE TWO SIDES WERE LOCKED IN MORTAL COMBAT. THE GREAT BATTLE AXES CLANGED ON SHIELDS, FIERCE INARTICULATE SHOUTS ROSE ABOVE THE CLASH OF STEEL. BUT EVEN IN THE CLAMOUR AND CONFUSION THE SON OF SVEN THE CHIEF COULD SEE AND HEAR ONLY THE DREAD PHANTOMS OF HIS DREAMS.



AND THERE, IN THE MIDST OF BATTLE, THE SON OF A VIKING CHIEF THREW DOWN HIS ARMS AND FLED! FOR A MOMENT, SVEN THE MIGHTY WAS UNGUARDED - AND AN ENEMY SPEAR PLUNGED HOME.



DESPITE THE LOSS OF THEIR LEADER, THE TRIBE OF SVEN THE VIKING BESTED THE FOE IN A BITTER CONFLICT. THEN THEY CAME FOR THE CHIEF'S SON...

YOU PROVED A COWARD IN BATTLE, SVENSON, AND OUR CHIEF, YOUR FATHER, DIED BECAUSE OF IT. NOTHING CAN ATONE FOR THAT.

SEIZE THE COWARDLY DOG! HE SHALL DIE AS ALL COWARDS DIE — ON THE ISLAND OF SKAGGER!

SO IT WAS THAT GUDVIED THE SORCERER TOOK THE SON OF SVEN TO THE ISLAND OF SKAGGER ABOARD A LEAN DRAGON SHIP. THE NUMBNESS OF DESPAIR HAD PARALYSED THE YOUNG MAN...

EVEN I DO NOT UNDERSTAND. YOU WERE ALWAYS THE BRAVEST OF THE YOUNG MEN.

IT WAS MY DREAMS! THEY DRAINED THE LIFE AND COURAGE FROM ME. CAN YOU EXPLAIN THEM, GUDVIED?

AS THE LONGSHIP CROSSED THE MISTY NORTHERN SEA, GUDVIED LISTENED. BUT ALL HIS WARLOCK'S WISDOM COULD NOT UNRAVEL THE MEANING OF THE DREAMS.

I DREAMED OF STRANGE BATTLES—AND OF MONSTERS! WEIRD BEINGS WITH A SINGLE GREAT HORN, THAT STALKED ME WITHOUT LEGS AND BREATHED A FIERY BREATH!



AT LAST THE DRAGON SHIP NEARED THE ISLAND OF SKAGGER...



WHERE WILD WOLVES ROAMED—WHERE ANY MAN LEFT ALONE WOULD DIE A TERRIBLE DEATH.

THEY PUT THE COWARD ASHORE ON THE ISLAND OF DISHONOURABLE DEATH, KNOWING THAT, WEAPONLESS, HE WOULD SOON FALL VICTIM TO THE RAVENOUS WOLVES.



LATER WE SHALL RETURN WITH YOUR STORY CARVED ON A RUNESTONE, SVENSON...

I MUST KNOW, GUDVIED. MY LIFE AND HONOUR HAS BEEN LOST THROUGH A DREAM. WHAT WAS THE BATTLE? WHAT WERE THOSE MONSTERS? YOU ARE A MIGHTY SORGERER... GIVE ME AN ANSWER!

STILL THE YOUNG MAN'S CRIES FOLLOWED GUDVIED AS HE BOARDED THE LONGSHIP...

YOU MUST TELL ME, GUDVIED!
AM I TO DIE WITHOUT KNOWING
WHY? REVEAL TO ME THE
MEANING OF MY DREAMS!
I MUST FIND THAT WEIRD
BATTLE!



THE WARLOCK SMILED SADLY...



SEEK THE BATTLES
YOU DREAMED OF.—
SON OF SVEN—AND
MAY ODIN BE WITH YOU
IN YOUR QUEST.

THUS ENDED THE HISTORY INSCRIBED ON
THE RUNESTONE OF SKAGGER.



Chapter 2. *Strange Commando*



A THOUSAND YEARS SEPARATE THE TALE OF THE VIKING WHOSE DREAMS SENT HIM TO A HIDEOUS DEATH AND THE SECRET RECORD OF A SECOND WORLD-WAR COMMANDO RAID. SEPARATE—OR DID THOSE THOUSAND YEARS BRIDGE THE GULF OF TIME...?

THERE MAY BE NO CONNECTION AT ALL. I HAVE PRESENTED THE RECORD FROM THE PAST. THE MODERN STORY IS EVERY BIT AS STRANGE...

IN THE MIDDLE YEARS OF THE WAR, MANY RAIDING PARTIES LEFT BRITAIN FOR SUDDEN, LETHAL ONSLAUGHTS ON OCCUPIED EUROPE. COMMANDER STEVENS, R.N., OF COMBINED OPERATIONS, LED ONE SUCH COMMANDO RAID. ITS TARGET WAS A RADAR AND WEATHER STATION IN NORWAY...



THE COMMANDOS SWARMED ASHORE AND THERE WAS NO HINT OF OPPOSITION, FOR THE LANDING-PLACE HAD BEEN SELECTED WITH CARE.

IF THE REST OF THE OPERATION GOES AS WELL AS THE LANDING, WE SHOULD BE WELL CLEAR BEFORE THE NAZIS GET ORGANISED.

I JUST HOPE WE MAKE IT BEFORE THOSE PANZERS WE HEARD ABOUT MOVE IN.

THE COMMANDER NODDED CRISPPLY. HE HAD NO WISH FOR HIS FORCE TO TANGLE WITH NAZI ARMOUR.

THE RADAR STATION FIRST, THEN THE WEATHER POST. WE *MUST* BLOW THEM AND BE CLEAR IN TIME!



LEADING THE FIRST ELEMENTS TOWARDS THE RADAR SITE, CAPTAIN LLOYD FELT THE EXCITEMENT OF IMMINENT ACTION BUBBLING THROUGH HIM.

'WARE MINES!
WE SHOULD BE ABLE
TO BREAK THROUGH
ABOUT A HUNDRED
YARDS ON,
SERGEANT-MAJOR
STEEL.

RIGHT, SIR!
KEEP QUIET,
BACK THERE!



PRIVATE GINGER MARTIN, ONE OF THE BREN GUNNERS BRINGING UP THE REAR OF THE GROUP, GRIMACED AT HIS NUMBER TWO...

COR! TO HEAR
OLD STEEL, ANYONE'D
THINK WE WERE
ON PARADE.

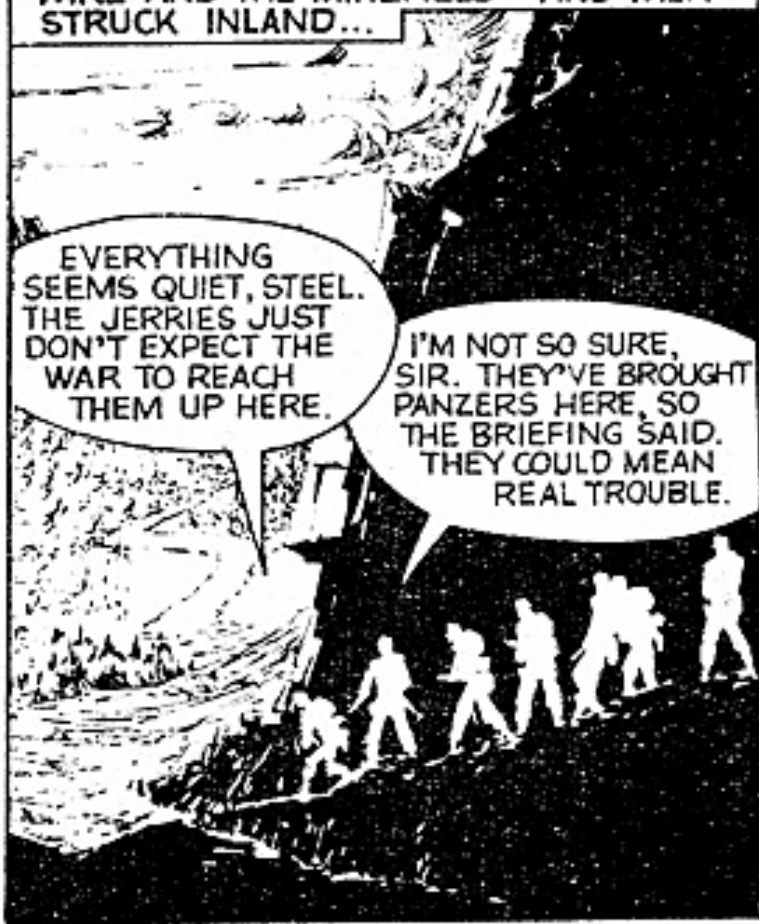
PUT A
SOCK IN IT,
GINGER!



THEY SKIRTED THE LAST OF THE BARBED WIRE AND THE MINEFIELD - AND THEN STRUCK INLAND...

EVERYTHING
SEEMS QUIET, STEEL.
THE JERRIES JUST
DON'T EXPECT THE
WAR TO REACH
THEM UP HERE.

I'M NOT SO SURE,
SIR. THEY'VE BROUGHT
PANZERS HERE, SO
THE BRIEFING SAID.
THEY COULD MEAN
REAL TROUBLE.



THE ADVANCE PARTY BREASTED THE PINE-CLAD RIDGE CAUTIOUSLY...

THERE IT IS —
THE RADAR
STATION!

JUST
LIKE THE
MODELS...

LET'S GET
THE PERISHING
THING BLOWN UP
AND SCARPER!

IN THE NARROW VALLEY, A THIN
STREAM WOUND WHITELY
BENEATH THE MOON.
CROWNING THE DISTANT CREST
WERE THE MASTS AND BUILDINGS
OF THE RADAR STATION.



CAPTAIN LLOYD LED HIS MEN DOWN
TOWARDS THE STREAM...

EXTRA CARE FROM HERE
ON, SERGEANT-MAJOR.
WE'VE GOT TO GET AS
FAR UP THAT SLOPE AS
POSSIBLE BEFORE
THEY SPOT US.



THEY WADED ACROSS THE ICY STREAM
AND BEGAN THE SLOG UP THE NEXT
SLOPE. EVERY STEP NOW WAS FRAUGHT
WITH DANGER...



HALFWAY UP THE HILLSIDE THE SILENCE
WAS SHATTERED BY THE CRACK AND
WHINE OF BULLETS - NAZI BULLETS.

TAKE COVER -
SPREAD OUT -
MARTIN, TAKE YOUR
BREN' TO THE LEFT,
MOVE!

YESSIR!



FLAT ON THEIR STOMACHS, GINGER MARTIN AND BILL ROGERS INCHED THEIR WAY OVER ROCKS AND THROUGH THE SPARSE VEGETATION.

HEY, BILL,
THESE JERRIES
MEAN BUSINESS!

KEEP YOUR
HEAD DOWN, GINGER—
OR YOU'LL HAVE A
HOLE IN IT!

THE OUTFLANKING MOVEMENT
WAS TAKING TOO MUCH TIME
AND CAPTAIN LLOYD TOOK AN
ANXIOUS GLANCE AT HIS WATCH...

HANG IT! THE MAIN PARTY
WILL BE UP SOON AND
WE HAVEN'T DONE
OUR JOB.

THEY'LL HEAR
THE SHOOTING,
SIR—SO THEY'LL
HAVE SOME
WARNING.

THE BREN CREW WERE IN POSITION AT LAST AND AS SOON AS GINGER MARTIN OPENED UP, THE OTHER BREN JOINED IN.



SERGEANT DODDS HAD BEEN DETAILED WITH HIS SECTION TO MOVE OUT TO THE RIGHT AND TO CO-ORDINATE HIS ATTACK WITH THE BREN FIRE.

READY, LADS —
A STRAIGHT RUSH
IN WHERE THEY'RE
NOT EXPECTING
US!



THE COMMANDOS BURST FROM COVER, FIRING HARD.

COME ON!
INTO 'EM!

ACHTUNG!
KOMMANDO!



BUT THEIR HEADLONG CHARGE WAS SUDDENLY HAMMERED TO A HALT AS ENEMY FIRE THRASHED INTO THEM FROM RIGHT, LEFT AND CENTRE...

WE'VE GOT THEM!
KILL THEM ALL!

A TRAP!
FALL BACK
AND GROUP
AROUND
ME!



AUTOMATIC WEAPONS STAMMERED VICIOUSLY AS THE FEW SURVIVING COMMANDOS GROUPED AROUND SERGEANT DODDS.



PULL BACK -
CAREFULLY NOW.
NO RUNNING - WE'LL
DO THIS LIKE THE
DRILL BOOK SAYS!

THE FIERCE UPSURGE OF FIRING ON HIS RIGHT FLANK TOLD CAPTAIN LLOYD ALL WAS NOT WELL.

DODDS HAS RUN INTO
TROUBLE, SERGEANT-
MAJOR. THERE MUST
BE MORE JERRIES
THAN WE BARGAINED
FOR.



I'LL TAKE
A LOOK,
SIR!

IF ANYTHING, THE RATE OF FIRE HAD INCREASED AS THE GERMANS STROVE TO WIPE OUT THE RETREATING COMMANDOS.

THE SAR'NT'S
BOUGHT IT! KEEP
MOVING, LADS!



THEN, AS THE R.S.M. CAME IN SIGHT OF THE ACTION, MORTARS BEGAN TO SAVAGE THEM. HE STARED IN DISMAY AT THE PITIFULLY FEW KHAKI-CLAD FIGURES.

THEY'RE PULLING OUT —
WHAT'S LEFT OF 'EM!
WE'VE FAILED TO BREAK
THROUGH TO THE
STATION!

CAPTAIN LLOYD GRIMACED AT THE NEWS AND TURNED TO ONE OF HIS JUNIOR OFFICERS...

THE FLANK ATTACK
GOT NOWHERE, TIM. BUT
WE *MUST* BREAK THROUGH —
THE COMMANDER WILL BE UP WITH
THE MAIN PARTY AT ANY MINUTE.
GIVE US SMOKE FROM YOUR
MORTARS — WE'RE GOING IN WITH
THE BAYONET!

BRITISH MORTARS NOW BEGAN TO ADD THEIR QUOTA TO THE CONFUSION OF BATTLE, AND SOON THE COMMANDO LINE WAS WREATHED IN SMOKE. TENSELY THEY WAITED...



CAPTAIN LLOYD WAS ABOUT TO GIVE THE ORDER TO MOVE WHEN, OUT OF THE THICKENING SMOKE, APPEARED A SOLITARY FIGURE...



FINGERS INSTINCTIVELY TIGHTENED ON TRIGGERS AS THE COMMANDOS STARED IN STARTLED SURPRISE AT THE NEWCOMER...

COR!
WHERE DID
HE COME
FROM?

GRAB HIM
QUICK BEFORE
HE GETS HIMSELF
KILLED!

HE'S NOT
GERMAN - HE'S
IN BRITISH
BATTLEDRESS.

IT WAS PRIVATE BILL ROGERS
WHO DASHED OUT INTO THE BULLET-
LASHED SMOKE TO DRAG
THE MYSTERIOUS STRANGER
INTO THE PRECARIOUS
SAFETY OF THE TREES.

COME ON,
MATE, LOOK
LIVELY!

WHAT -
WHERE AM I?
THAT NOISE -
IT'S TERRIBLE!



IT WAS NO MOMENT FOR POLITENESS. BILL ALMOST FLUNG THE MAN INTO COVER AND DROPPED FLAT HIMSELF.

LUMME! YOU MUST BE BONKERS STANDING AROUND IN THIS!

GOOD WORK, ROGERS. KEEP AN EYE ON HIM, WILL YOU - UNTIL WE'RE SURE HE'S NOT A JERRY!

CAPTAIN LLOYD NERVED HIMSELF ONCE AGAIN TO GIVE THE ORDER TO ADVANCE BUT ANOTHER INTERRUPTION CHOKED IT IN HIS THROAT...

MESSAGE FOR CAPTAIN LLOYD FROM THE COMMANDER—
URGENT!

A MESSAGE—
NOW!

AS THE RUNNER PANTED OUT THE MESSAGE
LLOYD FROWNED ANGRILY...

THE COMPANY IS TO
PULL BACK, SIR. WE'RE
GOING TO HIT THE WEATHER
STATION FIRST AS WE
CAN'T GET THROUGH
HERE!

PULL BACK?
BUT THIS WAS MY
JOB. IF I WITHDRAW
NOW I'LL ADMIT
FAILURE!

THE VETERAN SERGEANT-MAJOR
SHRUGGED WHEN HE WAS TOLD.

THERE WERE JUST TOO
MANY OF 'EM, SIR. WE'D
HAVE HAD A LOT OF
CASUALTIES. IT'S NO
DEFEAT TO PULL
BACK AND HIT 'EM
SOMEWHERE ELSE!

YES,
SERGEANT-
MAJOR, YOU'RE
RIGHT, OF COURSE.
VERY WELL,
TELL THE
MEN.

RELUCTANTLY, BITTERLY,
THE COMMANDOS FELL
BACK UNDER COVER
OF THEIR OWN SMOKE.

CAPTAIN LLOYD'S COMPANY SOON REJOINED THE MAIN PARTY UNDER COMMANDER STEVENS.

DON'T FRET OVER IT, HUGH. BUT WE *MUST* HIT THAT RADAR SITE BEFORE WE LEAVE!

I'M SORRY, SIR. I WAS JUST ABOUT TO LEAD A BAYONET CHARGE WHEN THE RUNNER REACHED US!

A BAYONET CHARGE! LUCKY FOR YOU YOU DIDN'T GO IN...

YES, SIR. BUT WE WOULD HAVE DONE IF A MAN HADN'T POPPED OUT OF THE SMOKE FROM NOWHERE AND DELAYED US.

CAPTAIN LLOYD REMEMBERED THAT DARK AND MYSTERIOUS FIGURE LOOMING FROM THE SMOKE.

THAT FELLOW WHO POPPED OUT OF THE SMOKE, SERGEANT-MAJOR. HAVE YOU STILL GOT HIM?

YES, SIR. D'YOU WANT TO TALK TO HIM?

HE MIGHT BE USEFUL. I DON'T HAVE TO TELL YOU, HUGH, THAT THIS BUSINESS ISN'T GOING AS PLANNED. BUT WE MUST DO WHAT WE CAME FOR, AND A LOCAL GUIDE MIGHT TURN THE ODDS.

THE STRANGER WAS BROUGHT BEFORE COMMANDER STEVENS. BEDRAGGLED AND BEWILDERED, THE MAN LOOKED AROUND HIM UNEASILY.

HERE HE IS, SIR. CLAIMS HE'S A NORWEGIAN.

WHO ARE YOU? WHAT'S YOUR NAME?



I AM A FREE NORWEGIAN SOLDIER. BUT I DO NOT KNOW HOW I CAME HERE - I CANNOT REMEMBER. MY NAME I KNOW - IT IS SVENSON!

SOMETHING ABOUT THE NORWEGIAN SOLDIER TOUCHED COMMANDER STEVENS STRANGELY - ALMOST AS IF HE HAD SEEN THE MAN BEFORE.

LET ME SEE YOUR PAYBOOK, SVENSON.

HERE IT IS, SIR. BUT IT SEEMS INCOMPLETE...



STEVENS STUDIED THE PAYBOOK. THE STRANGER HAD TOLD THE TRUTH, THE PAYBOOK WAS ALMOST BLANK...

INCOMPLETE IS RIGHT! YOUR NAME, SVENSON - AND YOUR STATION - THE ISLAND OF SKAGGER. H'MM. NEVER HEARD OF IT! YOU MIGHT BE SVENSON, AND AGAIN YOU MIGHT NOT. SAR'MAJOR, KEEP AN EYE ON THIS MAN, WILL YOU?

YES, SIR!

AS IF WE HAVEN'T ENOUGH TO WORRY ABOUT WITHOUT A PHONEY NORWEGIAN!

THE COMMANDOS RAPID CHANGE OF DIRECTION HAD THROWN THE NAZIS' DEFENCE OFF BALANCE AND STEVENS WAS ABLE TO BRING HIS MEN TO THEIR JUMP-OFF POINTS UNMOLESTED.

THERE IT IS, LADS. FORWARD WE GO - AND MAKE AS LITTLE NOISE AS POSSIBLE.

THE COMMANDOS MOVED STEALTHILY TOWARDS THE WEATHER STATION - DARTING FROM COVER TO COVER BUT ALWAYS GETTING CLOSER. STILL NO SHOTS CAME TO CHALLENGE THEIR ADVANCE...



BUT THE ENEMY HAD BEEN ALERTED - AND WAITED ONLY FOR THE CRUCIAL MOMENT TO STRIKE...

THEY'LL HAVE TO GET UP EARLIER THAN THIS IN THE MORNING IF THEY HOPE TO SURPRISE US. DON'T FIRE UNTIL I GIVE THE ORDER!



WATCHING THAT SILENT ADVANCE, CAPTAIN LLOYD BECAME AWARE THAT SVENSON, THE FREE NORWEGIAN SOLDIER, WAS STARING WITH PUZZLED EYES TOWARDS THE GERMAN POSITIONS.

ALL MY WILD WELSH ANCESTRY TELLS ME THERE IS SOMETHING STRANGE ABOUT THIS MAN — YET I CAN'T BELIEVE HE IS A GERMAN SPY.

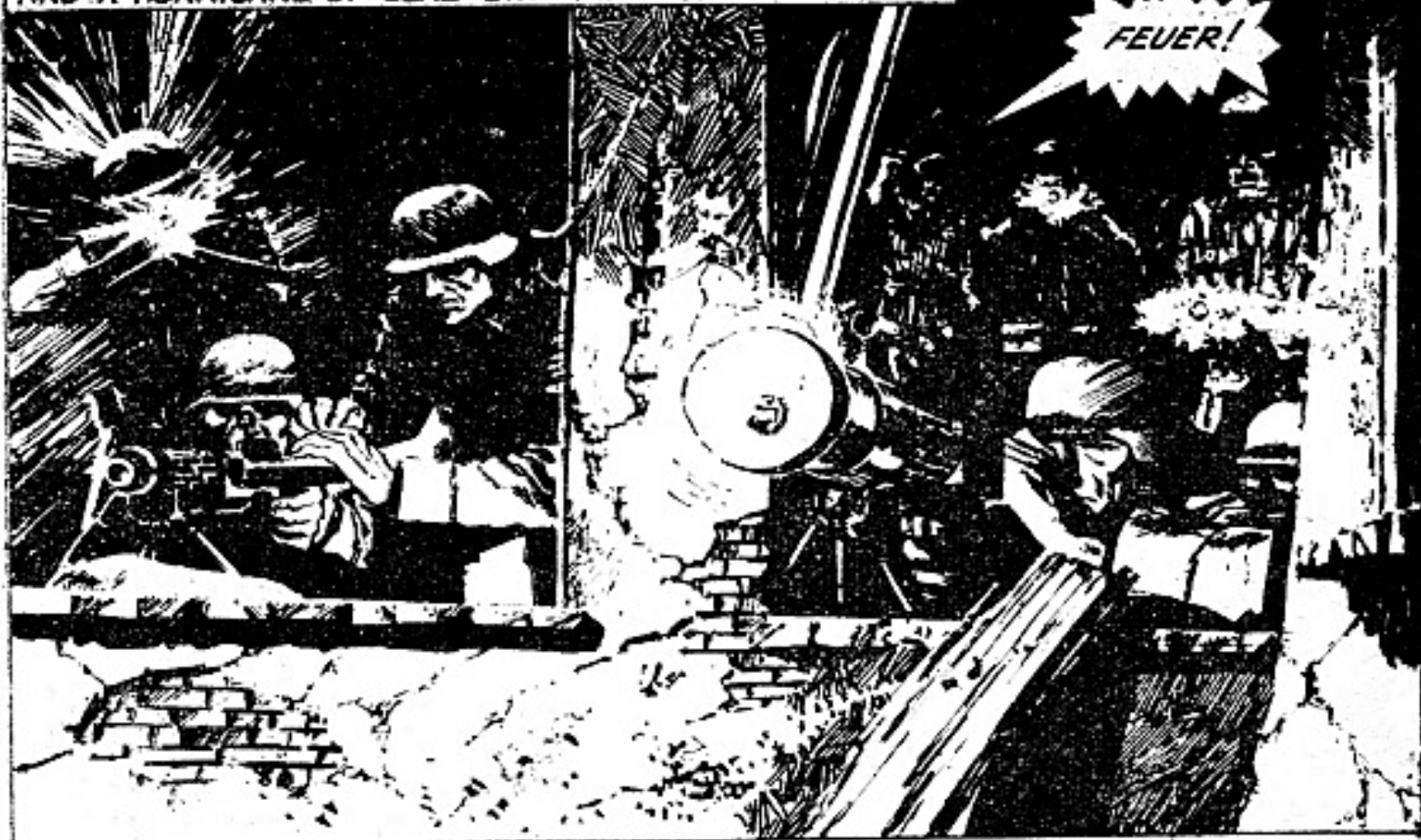
I WISH I COULD REMEMBER. MY NAME, SVENSON — THE ISLE OF SKAGGER, BUT WHAT ELSE —
WHAT ELSE?

SEEKING, PERHAPS, TO TEST THE MYSTERIOUS STRANGER, CAPTAIN LLOYD TRIED TO GOAD HIM INTO ACTION AGAINST THE GERMANS...

HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN THERE'S A WAR ON? YOU ARE A FREE NORWEGIAN — AND OVER THERE ARE YOUR ENEMIES, THE INVADERS OF YOUR COUNTRY.

YES! THAT I REMEMBER!
I CAME HERE TO FIGHT...
AND FIGHT I WILL!

AT THAT VERY MOMENT, THE NAZI GUNS FLAMED INTO LIFE AND A HURRICANE OF LEAD SWEEPED THE COMMANDO LINE.



BUT ONLY A FEW OF THE COMMANDOS WERE CUT DOWN BY THAT SHOCK BURST OF FIRE FOR SUPERB TRAINING AND CHAIN-LIGHTNING REFLEXES HURLED THEM TO THE GROUND.

GET THE MORTARS IN ACTION / AS SOON AS THE BOMBS GO IN - WE ATTACK!



AS THE MORTARS COUGHED AND THE TWO-INCH BOMBS SAILED OVER TO CRASH IN DEADLY EXPLOSIONS ON THE ENEMY DEFENCES, SVENSON STARTED UP IN HORROR...

WHAT'S UP, SVENSON?
SURELY YOU'VE SEEN
MORTARS IN ACTION
BEFORE?

MORTARS —
OF COURSE! IT'S
JUST THAT — THEY
SHOOK ME, JOLTED
MY MEMORY...

UNDER COVER OF THAT BATTERING BOMBARDMENT AND THE HARSH CLAMOUR OF BREN AND TOMMY GUNS, THE COMMANDOS WENT IN...

CHARGE!

A WILD AND FURIOUS MELEE
DEVELOPED ACROSS THE TRENCHES
AS COMMANDOS AND GERMANS
FOUGHT IT OUT HAND TO HAND...



SUDDENLY SVENSON
LET OUT A BLOOD-
CURDLING YELL AND
FLUNG HIMSELF
TOWARDS THE SCENE
OF CONFLICT...

AIEEE!
TO ARMS!
TO ARMS!



PAUSING ONLY TO SNATCH UP A FALLEN COMMANDO'S RIFLE AND BAYONET, HE PLUNGED INTO THE THICK OF THE FRAY.



THE COMMANDOS RALLIED TO THAT DEMONIAK FIGURE OF FIGHTING FURY—AND THE ENEMY BROKE.

NOW'S OUR CHANCE!
ATTACK! SVENSON'S
BROKEN THEM UP FOR
US!



AFTER THAT IT WAS A MERE QUESTION OF MOPPING UP THE SURVIVORS OF THE NAZI INFANTRY AND SETTING THE FUSES OF THE EXPLOSIVE CHARGES.

THAT WENT OFF VERY NICELY, GENTLEMEN - THANKS TO OUR FRIEND SVENSON. NOW WE WILL TACKLE THE RADAR STATION.

LET'S HOPE OUR ATTACK HERE DRAWS OFF SOME OF THE JERRIES FROM THE RADAR SITE.

SVENSON - MY THANKS FOR YOUR EFFORT - YOU SAVED MANY OF MY MEN'S LIVES.

IT IS NOTHING TO SLAY AN ENEMY...

THEN, WITH A SHATTERING DETONATION, THE WEATHER STATION BLEW UP. PHASE ONE OF THE COMMANDO MISSION WAS COMPLETED.



BUT PHASE TWO, THE DEMOLITION OF THE RADAR SITE, WAS TO BE AN EVEN MORE DESPERATE VENTURE.



Chapter 3. *The Monsters*

AS SVENSON JOINED WITH THE COMMANDOS IN THEIR FORCED MARCH ON THE RADAR-SITE, GINGER MARTIN AND BILL ROGERS FELL INTO STEP WITH HIM...



THE TRAIL LED ACROSS BOULDER-STREWN SLOPES, THROUGH SHADOWY PINE FORESTS...



COMMANDER STEVENS HALTED ON THE NEXT
RISE, CAUTIOUSLY STUDYING THE WAY
AHEAD WITH HIS GLASSES.

MM! THEY'RE
LYING ACROSS OUR
PATH, BUT WE'LL BEAT
'EM YET. GET THAT
NORWEGIAN FELLOW
UP HERE, JENKINS...

SVENSON CAME FORWARD EAGERLY...

SVENSON - DO YOU KNOW
THIS COUNTRY AT ALL? IS
THERE ANY OTHER ROUTE
WE CAN TAKE?

YES, COMMANDER.
THERE IS A WAY
AROUND - BUT IT IS
VERY DANGEROUS!

THE COMMANDOS WERE NOT MEN
TO BAULK AT DIFFICULTIES WHEN
THE SUCCESS OF THEIR MISSION
HUNG IN THE BALANCE.

PASS THE WORD TO
TAKE IT CAREFULLY.
I WANT LIVE COMMANDOS,
NOT DEAD HEROES...

VERY GOOD,
SIR - BUT THAT
SVENSON IS
SETTING A
CRACKING
PACE.

FOLLOWING ALONG THAT CRAZY TRACK, GINGER MARTIN'S FOOT SLIPPED, AND HE BEGAN TO SLIDE...

HELP!
I'M
FALLING!

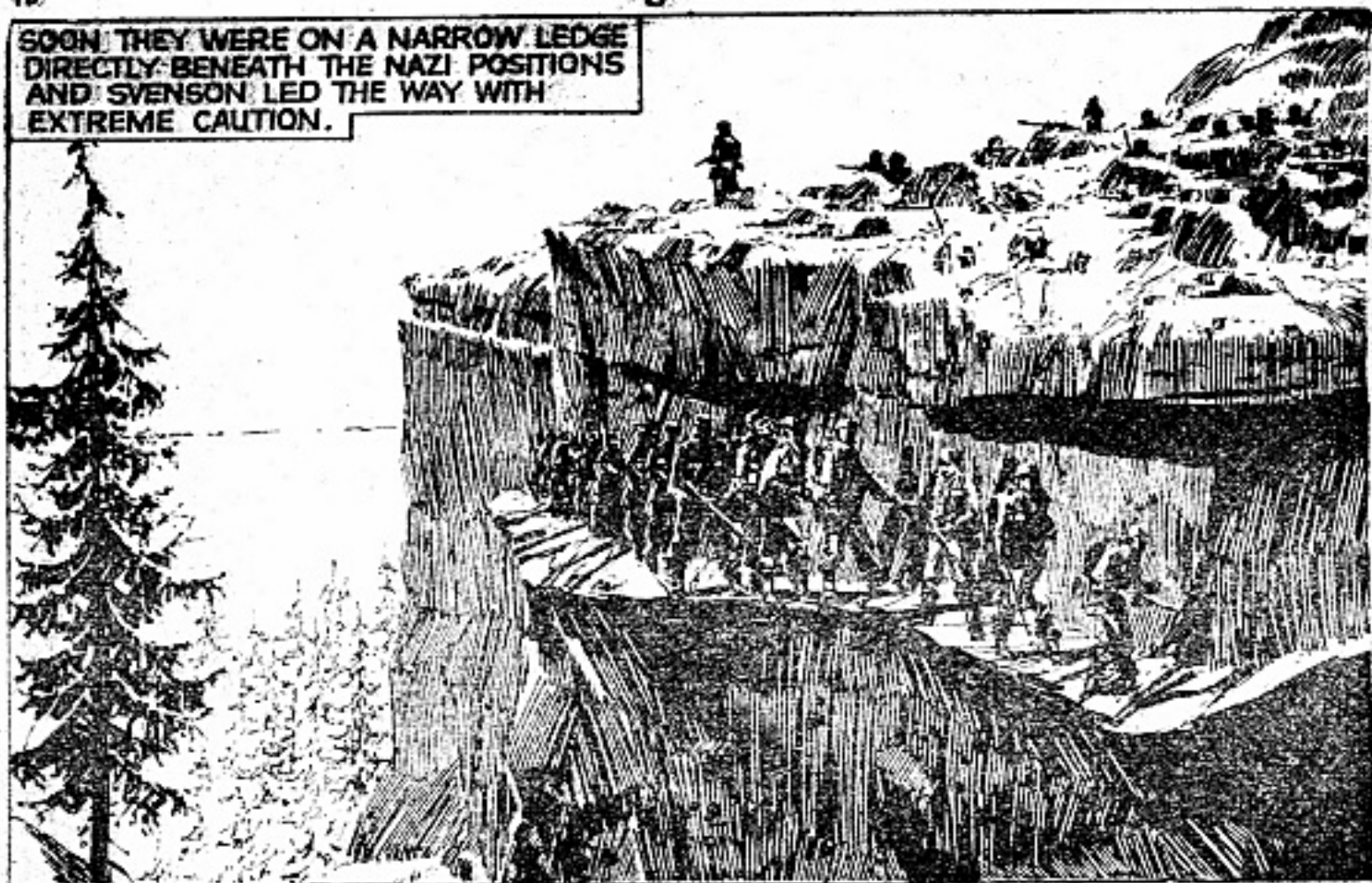
HOLD ON,
GINGER—AND
KEEP QUIET,
FOR PETE'S
SAKE!

IT WAS BILL ROGERS WHO FLUNG HIMSELF FORWARD TO GRAB HIS FRIEND'S HAND JUST IN TIME.

COME
UP!

THANKS, BILL!
COR! I THOUGHT
I'D BOUGHT
IT THEN!

SOON THEY WERE ON A NARROW LEDGE DIRECTLY BENEATH THE NAZI POSITIONS AND SVENSON LED THE WAY WITH EXTREME CAUTION.



SHIELDED FROM DIRECT OBSERVATION BY THE CLIFF OVERHANG, THE COMMANDOS INCHED PAST THE GERMAN POSITIONS. BUT IT WAS DEADLY DANGEROUS WORK.



AT LAST THAT SILENT ORDEAL WAS OVER AND THEY CAME OUT ON TO COUNTRY THAT PROVIDED GOOD COVER ALL THE WAY TO THE OBJECTIVE.

HE'S A QUEER COVE, THAT NORWEGIAN, BUT WE WOULDN'T HAVE GOT THIS FAR WITHOUT HIM!


AND THAT'S A FACT!

CAPTAIN LLOYD WAS DETAILED TO TAKE AN ADVANCE PARTY FORWARD TO SCOUT THE APPROACHES TO THE RADAR SITE. UNDETECTED THEY CREPT WITHIN SIGHT OF THE TARGET.

WHAT DO YOU MAKE OF IT, SAR'MAJOR? SEE ANY SIGN OF JERRIES?


NOT ONE, SIR. THEY MUST ALL BE GUARDING THE SADDLE APPROACH.

SVENSON HAD EDGED FORWARD BESIDE THE COMMANDO OFFICER AND HE SUDDENLY PUT OUT A RESTRAINING HAND.



WAIT, CAPTAIN.
ALL IS NOT WHAT
IT SEEMS.

THROUGH NARROWED, PALE BLUE EYES, SVENSON SURVEYED THE STRETCH OF OPEN COUNTRY.



AH - THERE -
IN A HOLE IN THE
GROUND. SIX OF
OUR ENEMIES!

YOU'RE RIGHT,
BY HEAVENS! A
SPANAU TEAM -
SITTING SNUG
WAITING FOR US
TO WALK ON TO
'EM!

A MORE SEARCHING SCRUTINY OF THE AREA WITH THE GLASSES DID NOT REVEAL ANY OTHER ENEMY POSITIONS AND LLOYD GAVE A HISS OF SATISFACTION.

YES, ONLY
HALF A DOZEN
OF THE DEVILS!
SAR'MAJOR, WE
CAN TAKE
THEM!

LEAVING SVENSON AND GINGER MARTIN BEHIND WITH THE BREN GUN, CAPTAIN LLOYD LED THE OTHERS FORWARD IN A SILENT STALK OF THE UNSUSPECTING ENEMY.

YOU MAY
HAVE A DODGY
MEMORY, SVENSON,
OLD MATE - BUT THERE'S
NOT MUCH WRONG
WITH YOUR
EYESIGHT!

THE GERMANS DID NOT EVEN SENSE THE PERIL CREEPING REMORSELESSLY UP ON THEM. THEN...

QUICK
AND QUIET!
NO
FIRING!



IT WAS ALL OVER IN A FEW FEVERISH SECONDS.

WILSON - TELL THE
COMMANDER WHAT'S
HAPPENED. SAY THE
REST OF THE WAY
LOOKS CLEAR.

RIGHT,
SIR!



CAPTAIN LLOYD TURNED TO THE NORWEGIAN, HIS DOUBTS OF THE STRANGER FOREVER BANISHED.

THANKS AGAIN,
SVENSON. YOU'RE
THE RIGHT SORT OF
SOLDIER TO HAVE
IN A BATTLE.

BATTLES -
I REMEMBER -
NO! IT ELUDES
ME...



COMMANDER STEVENS LED HIS MEN THROUGH THE POSITION CAPTURED BY CAPTAIN LLOYD.

GOOD WORK, HUGH, AND SVENSON, TOO. AS YOU'VE TAKEN THIS POSITION YOU CAN HOLD IT WHILE WE DISPOSE OF THE RADAR TARGET.

RIGHT, SIR—
WE'LL HOLD 'EM
OFF YOUR BACK
IF THEY COME
THIS WAY!

CAPTAIN LLOYD'S COMPANY SELECTED THEIR DEFENSIVE POSITION AND DUG IN.

THIS IS THE PART
THAT GETS ME—THE WAITING!
HOW LONG ARE THOSE
DEMOLITION BOYS GOING
TO TAKE TO BLOW THAT
DUMP SKY-HIGH?

YOU WORRY
TOO MUCH, GINGER.
THE JERRIES DON'T
EVEN KNOW WE'RE
HERE YET!

OVERCOMING SLIGHT OPPOSITION AT THE TARGET, THE COMMANDOS SET ABOUT THE DEMOLITION, BUT COMMANDER STEVENS WAS EDGY...

EVERYTHING'S GOING SMARTLY, SIR. GIVE THE LADS ANOTHER HALF HOUR...

I'M GOING TO CAPTAIN LLOYD'S POSITION, SERGEANT-MAJOR - IF JERRY'S COMING, HE'LL COME THAT WAY!

VERY GOOD, SIR. BUT, WE'LL BE ALL RIGHT!

STILL NOTHING HAD STIRRED ACROSS THE FLAT AREA FRONTING LLOYD'S POSITION. HIS MEN WAITED, WATCHFUL, FINGERS ON TRIGGERS...

ALL QUIET, HUGH?

NOTHING MOVING, SIR. MAYBE THEY WON'T TURN UP UNTIL AFTER THE BIG BANG.


The Unguarded Hour

THEN, ABRUPTLY, STRIDENTLY, THE WAITING TENSION BROKE. OUT FROM THE TREES BURST A HORDE OF GREY UNIFORMS, RACING HEADLONG TOWARDS THE THIN LINE OF COMMANDOS.

CHARGE!
FOR THE
FUEHRER!



THAT FIRST SUDDEN RUSH CARRIED THE NAZI ONSLAUGHT CLEAR UP TO THE BRITISH POSITIONS. BUT IT WAS MET WITH COOL ACCURATE FIRE FROM MEN WHO WOULD NOT BE PANICKED.



IN THE CLAMOUR AND CONFUSION OF THE STRUGGLE SVENSON FOUGHT LIKE A MAN POSSESSED. BUT HE FAILED TO NOTICE A GERMAN ABOUT TO ATTACK HIM FROM THE REAR - UNTIL COMMANDER STEVENS SHOUTED...



THE COMMANDER'S SNAPPED SHOT MISSED AND THEN HIS REVOLVER CLICKED EMPTY. THE BIG NAZI LUNGED AT HIM AND SVENSON MOVED LIKE LIGHTNING...



THE NAZI ATTACK WAS HURLED BACK, BROKEN — AND THE COMMANDOS TOOK UP THEIR DEFENSIVE POSITIONS AGAIN...

SVENSON SAVED MY LIFE THERE WITHOUT A DOUBT. A STRANGE CHAP...

FOR A MOMENT, I ALMOST REMEMBERED — IT WAS AS IF IT HAD HAPPENED BEFORE. BUT NOT IN QUITE THE SAME WAY!

A RUNNER RACED UP TO THE C.O.

THERE'S BEEN A HITCH, SIR. THE MAJOR SAYS CAN YOU HOLD ON FOR ANOTHER FIFTEEN MINUTES?

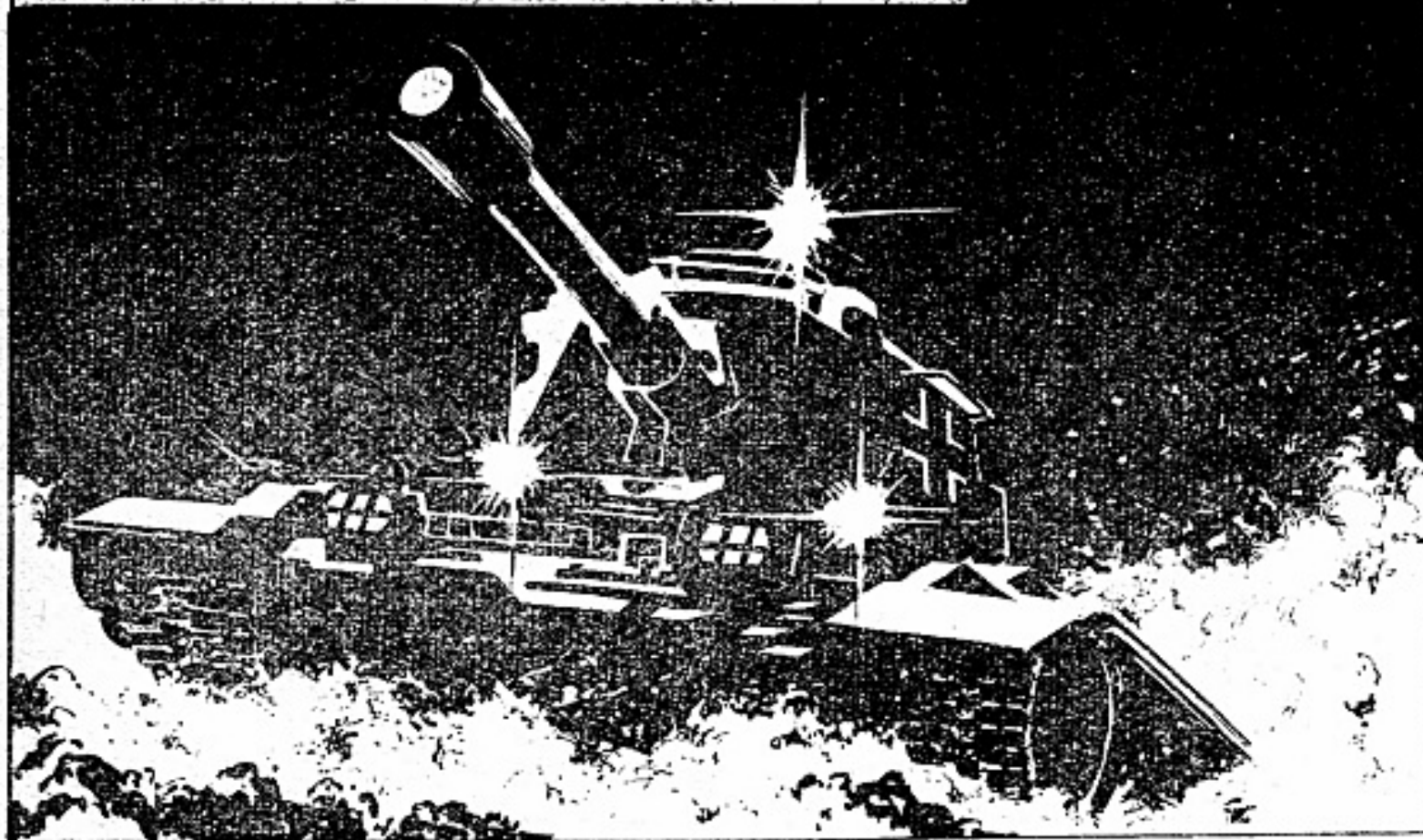
IF WE HAVE TO, WE WILL!

THEN, WITH BLOOD-CHILLING FINALITY, CAME AN OMINOUS CLANKING AND A RUMBLE OF POWERFUL ENGINES...

DO YOU HEAR THAT?

PANZERS!

THE GREAT STEEL JUGGERNAUTS THUNDERED INTO VIEW, SPANDAU MACHINE GUNS FLICKERING WICKEDLY IN THEIR SINISTER BLACK HULLS.



SHELTERING BEHIND THEM WERE THE GERMAN INFANTRY - SECURE FROM THE SEARCHING FIRE OF THE COMMANDO BREN GUNS...



SVENSON GASPED IN HORROR AT THOSE ADVANCING TANKS, THE LONG GUN MUZZLES JUTTING BEFORE THEM LIKE GREAT HORNS, BELCHING VIVID TONGUES OF FLAME AS THE GUNS SPOKE...

NO! NO!
THE MONSTERS!
THE MONSTERS
OF MY DREAMS!

HIS NERVE COMPLETELY BROKEN,
SVENSON LEAPED TO HIS FEET
AND BEGAN TO RUN...

HEY, WHAT'S UP
WITH SVENSON?

HE'LL GET
HIMSELF KILLED!
GRAB HIM,
GINGER!

BILL ROGERS LEAPT OUT OF COVER AND SWEEP SVENSON OFF HIS FEET IN A HEADLONG TACKLE.



GET DOWN,
YOU NITWIT!

THE
MONSTERS!

OVER TO THE LEFT, ONE COMMANDO HAD USED A GRENADE TO GOOD PURPOSE AND A PANZER HAD GROUND TO A HALT WITH A SMASHED TRACK.



THAT SOLDIER/
HE STOPPED THE
MONSTER!

KNOCK IT OFF,
SVENSON! IT'S BAD
ENOUGH AS IT IS WITH-
OUT CALLING THOSE
TANKS MONSTERS!

YOU'VE SEEN
A PANZER BEFORE,
SURELY, SVENSON,
THE NAZIS USE
'EM ENOUGH...

SLOWLY A LIGHT OF UNDERSTANDING BROKE ACROSS SVENSON'S TORTURED FEATURES. HE REACHED OUT, TOOK GRENADES FROM MARTIN AND STARTED TO CRAWL FORWARD...

QUICK, GIVE HIM COVER, GINGER - THE CRAZY COOT'S GOING TO TACKLE THOSE JERRIES ON HIS OWN!

A METAL MONSTER - WITH THE ENEMY INSIDE! NOW I SEE!

SVENSON'S FIRST GRENADE SENT A TRACK SPINNING FROM A PANZER - THE SECOND BLASTED A DRIVING WHEEL OUT OF TRUE. HE REACHED FOR THE THIRD...



THE NORWEGIAN SWEEPED AWAY ALL HIS HARROWING DOUBTS AND FEARS IN THAT BRIEF, SAVAGE BURST OF ACTION. HE KNOCKED OUT THREE TANKS SINGLEHANDED. THEN THE BATTLEFIELD QUAKED TO THE THUNDEROUS ROAR OF A GIANT EXPLOSION AS THE RADAR SITE WAS DESTROYED.



THE COMMANDOS HAD SNATCHED SUCCESS FROM THE BRINK OF DEFEAT. BUT IN THAT MOMENT OF VICTORY, THE STRANGE WARRIOR IN THEIR MIDST STAGGERED AND FELL...



SVENSON'S
DOWN!

HE'S A GONNER,
THEN! IF THE SHRAPNEL
DIDN'T KILL HIM, THE BLAST
WOULD HAVE - HE WAS
THAT NEAR TO THE
BURST!

A QUICK EXAMINATION OF SVENSON'S BODY CONFIRMED THE VETERAN R.S.M.'S GUESS. SVENSON WAS DEAD ALTHOUGH THERE WAS NOT A WOUND ON HIM. REGRETFULLY THE COMMANDOS LEFT HIM WHERE HE LAY AND BEGAN TO PULL BACK.



A STRANGE LOOK OF REGRET, OF HAUNTING SORROW, SHOWED IN COMMANDER STEVEN'S EYES.

I STILL CAN'T SHAKE OFF THE FEELING I'VE SEEN SVENSON BEFORE. HE WAS A BRAVE MAN INDEED.

THERE MUST HAVE BEEN SOMETHING OF THE VIKING IN HIM, SIR - THEY WERE GREAT FIGHTERS, I BELIEVE.

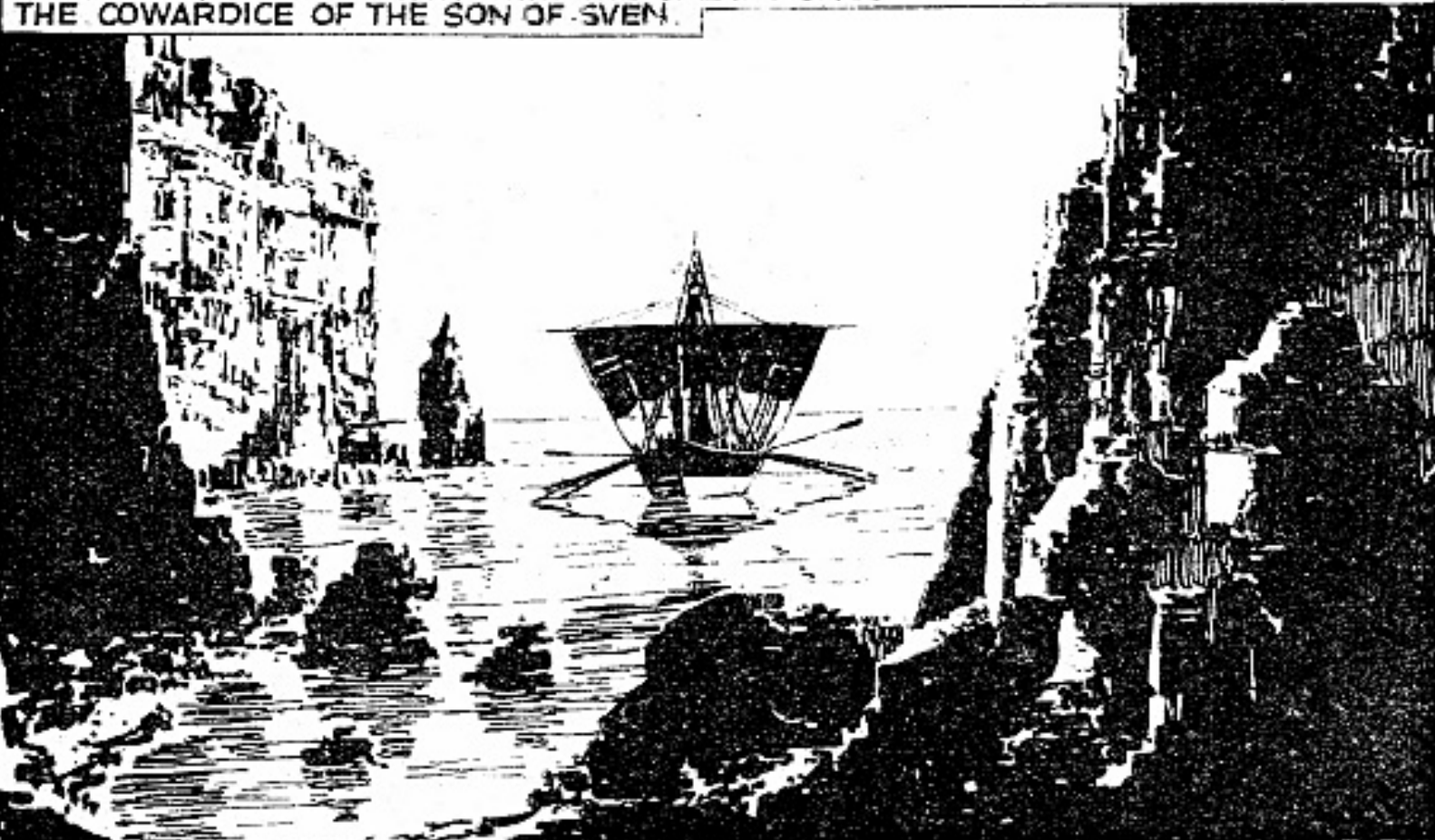


Chapter 4. *The Runestone Mystery*

THUS ENDED THE SECRET WAR OFFICE RECORD OF A COMMANDO RAID. NO-ONE EVER FOUND OUT WHO SVENSON WAS. BUT THE ISLAND OF SKAGGER, NOW— THAT IS DIFFERENT...



IT SEEMED THAT GUDVIED THE SORCERER RETURNED TO SKAGGER AS HE HAD PROMISED, BEARING WITH HIM THE GREAT RUNESTONE TELLING THE STORY OF THE COWARDICE OF THE SON OF SVEN.



THE VIKINGS CAREFULLY CARRIED THE STONE ASHORE WHICH WAS TO COMMEMORATE THAT ACT OF SHAME



WE SHALL NOT FIND HIS BODY AND FOR THAT I AM GLAD. THE WOLVES DO NOT FEED DELICATELY HERE ON THE ISLAND OF SKAGGER...

THEY LABOURED UP THE BEACH WITH THE STONE. THEN A VIKING CRIED OUT, HIS VOICE HIGH-PITCHED WITH SHOCK:

LOOK! THE CHIEF'S SON! SEE, HE LIES THERE ASLEEP!

ASLEEP... NO, HE IS DEAD...



THE VIKINGS CROWDED ROUND THE BODY OF THE SON OF SVEN AND THEIR TONES WERE HUSHED WITH AWE...

HE IS DEAD. BUT THE WOLVES HAVE NOT TOUCHED HIM!

THERE IS NOT A MARK ON HIS BODY!



GUDVIED THE WARLOCK STOOPED OVER THE BODY, A SADNESS AND WONDER IN HIS EYES.

AND DID YOU
FIND YOUR MONSTERS,
SVENSON? DID YOU FIND
THOSE BATTLES YOU SOUGHT?
PERHAPS YOU DID - FOR
THE SPIRITS TELL ME YOU
ACQUITTED YOURSELF
LIKE A TRUE VIKING!

THUS ENDS THE STORY ON THE RUNESTONE FROM THE ISLAND OF SKAGGER. IS THERE SOME STRANGE CONNECTION BETWEEN THESE TWO STORIES - ONE FROM A BYGONE ERA AND THE OTHER FROM A PRECISE OFFICIAL HISTORY OF MODERN DAY...

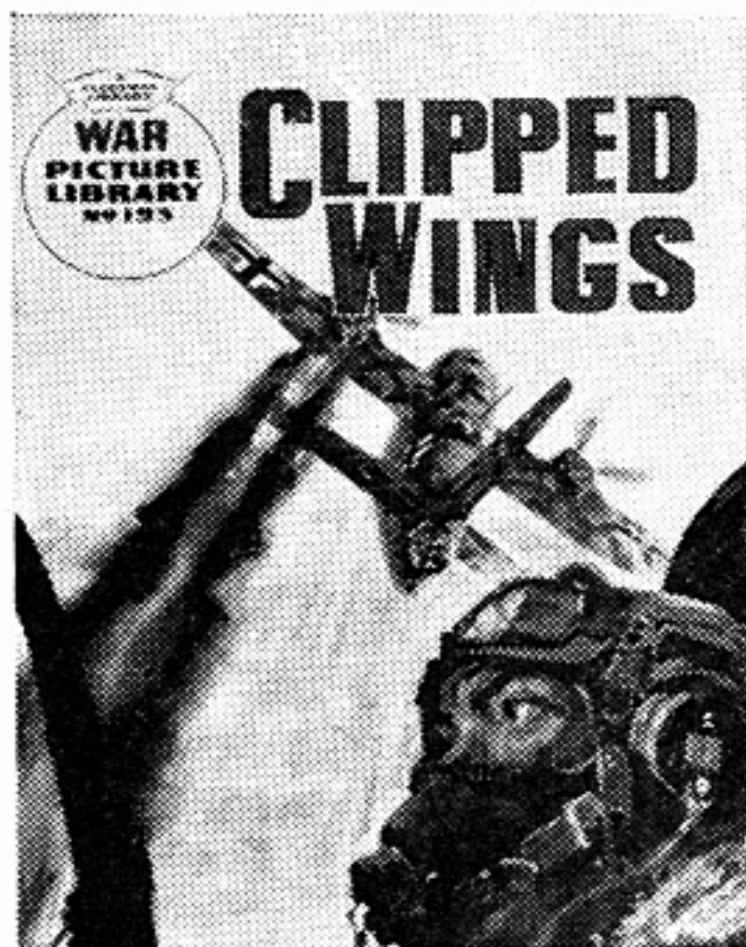
SVENSON WAS
PROBABLY A FREE
NORWEGIAN SOLDIER
WHO HAD LOST HIS
MEMORY. BUT WHO KNOWS
WHAT POWER THE
ANCIENT SORCERERS
WIELDED? YOU MUST
MAKE UP YOUR OWN
MIND...

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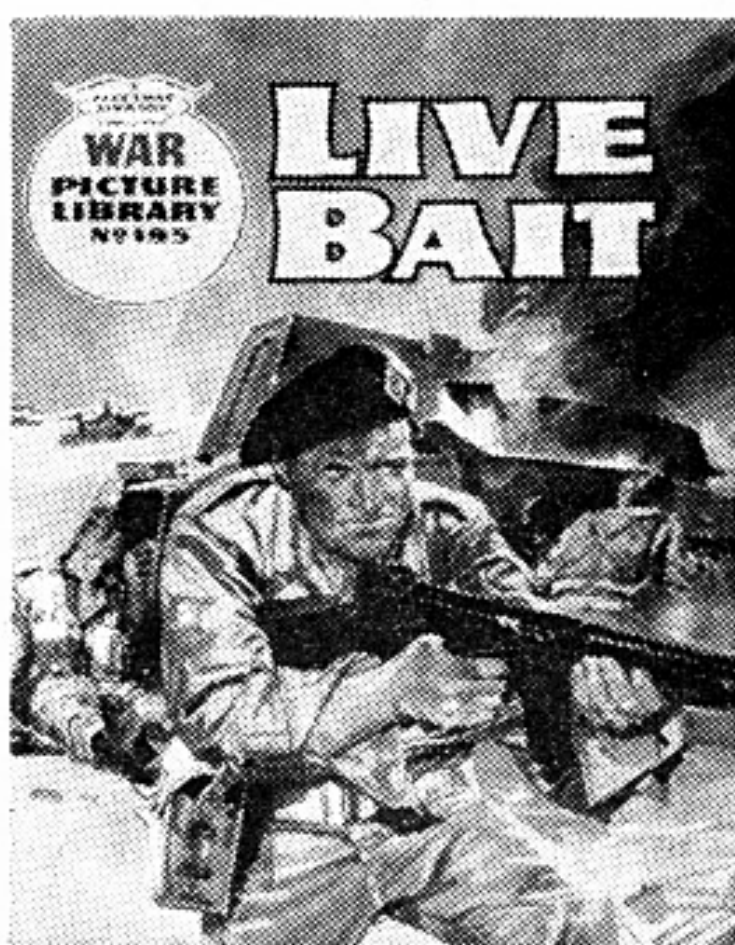
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Show them you can become a husky he-man

**IN 7 DAYS—I'LL PROVE YOU
CAN BE PROUD
OF YOUR BODY!**

Don't let others take the "mickey" out of you because of your skinny build! Give me seven days and I'll prove that you'll add powerful **NEW MUSCLE** so fast your friends will gape with wonder! I don't dose or doctor you. And I've no use for weights and other contraptions that may strain your vital inner organs.

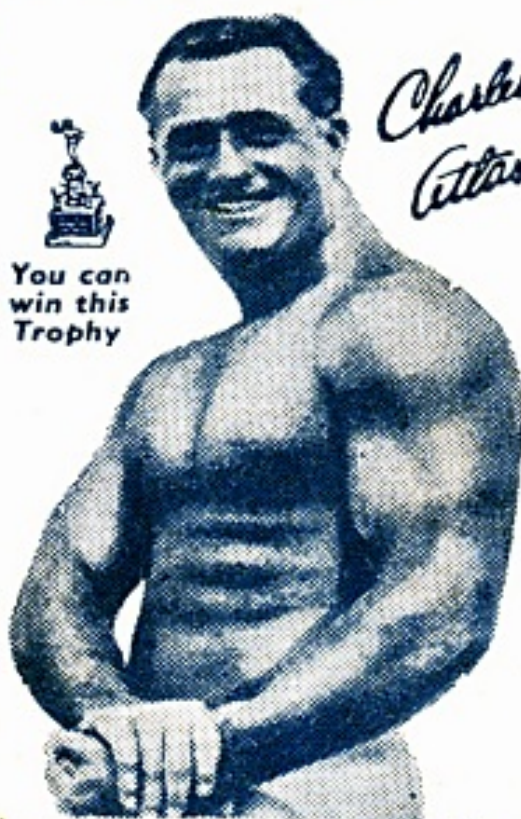
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